

Disarm Men, Don't arm Women - Militarization is not emancipation

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“Militarization is the step-by-step process by which something becomes *controlled by, dependent on, or derives its value from* the military as an institution or militaristic criteria.” Dr. Cynthia Enloe, [Maneuvers: the international politics of militarizing women's lives](#)

Is an increase in the number of women joining the military a sign of women's emancipation? No! It is a sign of the increasing militarization of society, which benefits neither women nor the Netherlands as a whole.

The issue is not whether women are capable or qualified for military duties. In many industrialized countries women are 10 percent or more of the formal militaries. Women comprise thirty percent of many armed opposition groups. Women's skills and leadership abilities are clear.

The issue that needs to be debated is how the militarization of women's lives will benefit women and society as a whole. Appropriate social norms and values, and a perceived rise in **zinloos geweld**, are now important debates within Dutch society. The militarization of women must be seen in this context.

Don't arm women, disarm men

Masculinity is increasingly linked to violence. Masculinity and associated male norms, such as control and dominance, are seen as normative and desirable. The acceptance of male norms has affected young girls, some of whom have started to use violent methods in their search for equality and recognition.

Women's militarization does not challenge this link between masculinity and violence. Nor does it challenge the use of violence as a legitimate way to solve political conflicts. Rather than encouraging women to become more involved in violence, men must be encouraged to redefine masculinity and break the links between being a “real” man and being violent.

The idea that women are inherently less violent than men also needs to be challenged. This idea leads to the myth that more women in a military will somehow ‘humanize’ militaries. Women are not kinder killers. Military systems are inherently dehumanizing—US Army Reserve Pfc. Lynndie England and the violation of the human rights of Iraqi detainees in Abu Ghraib prison are evidence of this. Finding more humane alternatives to war is the responsibility of the entire international community, not just women.

Women's emancipation is not the goal of any military. The recruitment of women in the military has more to do with declining numbers of young available males than with any desire to emancipate women. Studies from other western militaries also show that women inside the military face wide-spread sexual harassment and violence.

Some people will argue that military service provides worthwhile jobs and job training, especially for lower educated women. But most people do not learn skills within the military that can be transferred to civilian jobs. In some western countries, such as the USA, unemployment for veterans is higher than for non-veterans. Furthermore, what kind of society do we have if the military becomes an important employer? If military jobs enhance women's employment, this points to the need for more equitable opportunities for higher education.

Others might believe that military service provides access to decision-making processes and leadership positions for women. In democracies, even the highest-ranking officers are under the control of civilian politicians. This points to the need to increase the number of women in decision-making position in politics, not the military. Countries where military officers are in decision-making positions are most often dictatorships. And dictatorships have no respect for women's human rights.

Rather than spending money on the recruitment of more women in the military, the government should increase funding for the improvement of employment and educational opportunities for women, and especially for young women and **allochtonen** women.

Rather than recruiting more women for the military, the government should be taking immediate and practical steps to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, in order to increase the number of women at all decision-making levels in conflict prevention, management and resolution, and to support women's peacebuilding activities.

Rather than promoting military force as a solution to world problems, the government should reject war as a means to solve international political conflicts.

Rather than investing in weapons systems, the government should be investing in conflict prevention and in research, education and training in nonviolent conflict resolution.

Rather than recruiting women for the military, the government should invest in a European Civilian Peaceforce, as the European Parliament called for 10 years ago.

Militarization is not emancipation!